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Yaacov N. Goldstein

A JOURNEY TO THE PAST

A Kind of Preface

On 23 May 2000 my cousin, who was like a brother to me, died of an incurable disease in New York. He was Jack Goldstein (originally Yaakov-Leib Liebhaver). His daughter Carrie Bloom called me soon after he died, and told me that she and her brother David had decided to memorialize their father by translating into English the remembrance book of our town, Gniewosów. In that way they and their children could learn about their roots. In that conversation Carrie asked me to translate my childhood memories, as they appear in the book. Naturally I agreed most willingly.

Accordingly, I re-read what I had written in the 1960s, some forty years earlier. In the meantime I had journeyed to Poland several times, so I decided to add later impressions of our childhood town, mine and Jack's, in a kind of preface to what I had drawn from memory before I went back to the scene of the tragedy. This was the terrible tragedy that visited the Jewish people in general, and my large family, who perished in the Holocaust, in particular. It was the scene in which my parents, and a number of relatives, were murdered by Poles about six months after the war had ended.

Today I would write my memories in a different style; still, I decided to leave the text unchanged, for the sake of authenticity.

In summer 1987 I was invited to guide a group from Israel on a tour of Poland. The group consisted of Israelis of Polish origin, as well as some young people accompanying their parents who wished to show them their past and their roots. I accepted the invitation with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I was filled with feelings of hostility and rage towards Poland and its inhabitants in view of the dark chapter the country inscribed regarding its attitude to the Jews during the Second World War. Moreover, my hatred stemmed not only from

general knowledge of the criminal behavior of most Poles towards the Jews during and after the war; it also drew from my own bitter personal experience. It was Poles who cold-bloodedly murdered my parents, Pinhas and Sheindl Goldstein; my young uncle, aged twenty, my mother's brother, Eliyahu Kirschenbaum; my aunt Chaya Liebhaber (Jack's mother); and another young Jewish woman, Chava Boymeil. All these, survivors of the Holocaust, were murdered in our town Gniewoszczów in September 1945, about half a year after the war ended and nine months after the liberation of the region by the Red Army. I was saved because two days before the murder I traveled to Lodz, where my parents were supposed to join me soon after. The overall Jewish tragedy and my personal tragedy molded my attitude to Poland and the Poles. Hence my qualms about a return to that country after 43 years. On the other hand, the murder of my parents and relations, the details of which I did not know, gave me no rest, and drew me by a myriad unseen threads back to the town of my birth, where occurred that grim disaster that changed the entire course of my life.

As stated, my return to Poland in 1987 was my first visit there since I had left the country in autumn 1945, shortly after the murder of my parents. In 1987 Poland was still under communist rule, with all the implications: a totalitarian regime, discontented poverty among the population, empty shops, and long lines for every commodity. The dollar had enormous buying power. The tour covered the well known Jewish sites in Warsaw and Krakow, and the death camps: Treblinka, Auschwitz-Berkenau, and Majdanek. After the visit to Majdanek we visited the Jewish sites in Lublin, where the group had a half-day to themselves.

I took this opportunity to visit the town of my birth, where my parents and relatives were murdered. I rented a car, and with one member of the group, who spoke fluent Polish, I journeyed to the town. On the way I stopped at the village of Wysoka-Kolo, where I located the Maslowski family,

who during the war had hidden my parents, the family of my uncle Avraham Liebhaber, and the family of Pinhas Zweigenberg. I only found members of the next generation; the parents had died. I left them a sum of money in dollars, and continued to the town.

I was in a state of mental turmoil. I did not know if I would identify the places that were preserved in my memory, the recollections of a boy. I had no difficulty finding our house, a red-brick two-story house which always stood out in the town. By contrast, I could not identify the other places where my widely branched family lived. Above all, I was surprised to discover how small the town was. The distances from place to place were almost nothing, while in my memory they seemed endless.

The most painful moment in this brief visit, of less than two hours, was when a Pole pointed out the probable place where my parents were buried after their murder. The Poles had hidden the site, and by the time of my visit a granary belonging to one of the farmers stood on it.

Throughout the days of the tour of Poland I managed to restrain my feelings. Perhaps my job as guide and my responsibility for the group helped me to conceal and keep a grip on what I was feeling within. All these defenses were breached and I broke down on my return to my family in Israel, as I told them of my experiences in Poland generally and at the town in particular. This was the first time in my adult life, as far as I recall, that I was unable to hold back bitter weeping.

In 1993 I returned to Poland again. At the time I was on sabbatical leave at the University of Memphis, where I occupied the chair in Jewish Studies. I was invited to an international conference held at Warsaw University. My main motivation in accepting the invitation was the desire to show Poland to my wife Esther, nee Rubin. She indeed was born in Eretz Israel, but her parents had arrived there from Poland, and all her family were annihilated in the Holocaust. Her wish to see the landscapes where her parents had grown

up and whence they came was thus understandable, as was her great interest in visiting the camps that were the valley of destruction for millions of Jews.

During our stay in Poland we toured the usual places, including Majdanek and Lublin. At Lublin we stayed overnight. The following day we drove to the town, so that I could show my wife the place I had told her of after my first visit, including the house where I was born and passed my happy childhood days until the outbreak of the Second World War. The drive from Lublin to Gniwoszów, in the car of a Polish professor acquaintance from Lublin, was only about forty minutes. Again I experienced an emotional storm, which I fought off with all my power so as not to give it expression in the presence of strangers. In retrospect I can state that I was drawn, as if by magic cords, not only to boyhood memories but primarily to the place where my parents were murdered in the prime of life. Once again, as on my first visit, I found that apart from my parents' house, which I remembered exactly, it was difficult for me to identify the other houses of my family. And again I was mistaken about the town's dimensions. In the eyes of a grown man its size diminished drastically.

In 1995 I realized a dream: to conduct a tour of my roots in Poland with my children. This project materialized largely thanks to my wife, who urged me to make my dream come true. In solidarity with the spouses of my children, Liav, Ro'i, and Yael, she too did not join the tour. Beyond my personal wish to show my children the places they had learned or read about, or had heard of from my stories, I had always pondered the question of how it might be possible to convey to the next generation, the children of the survivors, the tragic legacy of the past, the legacy of the Holocaust.

The two final incentives that caused me to make the journey were first, the testimony I delivered that summer of 1995 to Yad Vashem in the framework

5

of evidence of children of the Holocaust, and second, a phone call from my first-born son Liav, on the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day, when he poured out his heart regarding his uncertainties and the problems of passing on the subject of the Holocaust to his first-born daughter Yuval. The entire issue had not existed for him before he became a family man, but it did arise when he had a family of his own, and his daughter was growing up and comprehending things. The problem for him was how to convey a subject so complex as the Holocaust to the third generation. Among other matters raised by my son, in that conversation that I recall so well, was the argument that beyond the family accounts of the tragedy, for him the Holocaust was largely an entirely abstract matter. Therefore, a visit to Poland, the chance of seeing the arena of the somber scene, could be an important step for him, which would help him transmit the subject of the Holocaust to his children.

The dilemma raised by my son drove home for me, in actual reality, the problem of the second generation, who even if they had absorbed the perception of the Holocaust from their parent, and not all parents told their children of their past, were hard pressed to pass the tragic heritage of the Holocaust on to the third generation. As stated, these were the final motivations that helped me to decide to go ahead with the tour of my roots that I had conceived.

With my children, I took the classic route of every Jew visiting Poland: Warsaw, Krakow, and the concentration camps. The focus of the tour was a visit to the town, which we went through on foot, starting from the part called Gniewoszów, and ending in the other part called Granycza, or Grenicz in Yiddish, where my parents' house, the cradle of my childhood, had stood. My children were unwilling to concede even a single drop of knowledge, although, to my sorrow, I could not quench their thirst for this. Quite simply, my memory failed me.

Emotions intensified as we progressed in our

walk through the streets of the town. They grew more powerful when we reached and stood outside the house of my maternal grandfather, Yona Kirschenbaum. They peaked when we came to my parents' house, my home, and stood outside. I could no longer hold back the tears, and involuntarily words sprang out from within me meant for my parents, murdered in their home by Poles: "Look, I've brought you your grandchildren". The four of us stood in silence facing the house, the relict of a widely branched family destroyed by the Nazis and murdered by Poles. Each one was absorbed in his or her private sensations. My three children strove to support me, anxious lest I fail to control the turbulence of my feelings.

The journey back to Warsaw, and indeed the rest of the stay in that city before our return flight to Israel, was a kind of anti-climax, except for the visit to the Jewish Historical Center.

These were my three emotional visits to Poland. On my meetings with my cousin Jack Goldstein (Yaacov-Leib Liebhaber) I would relate to him my impressions and the experiences I had undergone. Jack was quite a few years older than I, so he too remembered the town well. I suggested, more than once, that we go to visit the town together, in the hope that that would be of use for him, and he could be a good guide for me. Jack refused point-blank, and rejected any possibility that his feet would tread the accursed soil, in his view, of Poland.

May his memory be blessed.

June 2000

Haifa, Israel

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FROM A BOY'S RECOLLECTIONS

In memory of my parents, Pinhas Goldstein and Sheindl, daughter of Rabbi Yona Kirschenbaum, who were murdered by Poles in their town of Gniewosów after the war, having survived the Nazi hell.

Childhood

The time of my childhood passes before me as though through a mist. I remember one Sabbath, after the war had broken out, or thereabouts, and I, one child among the others of the small town, playing with children of about my age. Then oops! I've torn my new trousers. I can't very well go home with torn trousers, today being the Sabbath. Quietly I slip off to the rebbetsin, the rabbi's wife, who lives on the top floor of our house, and tell her my troubles, and she with a smile on her lips soothes me, saying that after the Sabbath she'll fix my trousers for me. I'll stay in her home until the stars come out, because you can't play in torn trousers. So I spend the afternoon hours of that Sabbath day at the home of the rebbetsin, playing with her daughter Dina, my own age. Through the door the rabbi's voice is heard, studying Torah.

Next to our house, a new stone building, salient in the town, the house of my grandmother, my father's mother, seems small. She is Hinda, daughter of R. Aharon Liebhaver. Grandmother's house is world full of goodies. In her shop you can get, and take, if you're careful, candies and all sorts of sweets, gobble them up behind her back and then go home like a hero and declare that you're not hungry. Mother begs her "poor" son, starving to death, to eat a spoonful of soup. She can't imagine that his belly is full of candies, and there's no room for soup. And Grandmother Hinda's boydem, the loft, now that's a marvel. A magic place, full of mystery, "treasures" beyond imagination a boy can find then, and he will never tire or cease his exploration. In one search of the boydem I found lots of sacks of money, and I at once envisaged myself as the new King Croesus, the entire world my private domain. With special grace I promise Dina, the rebbetsin's daughter, and my playmate, to let

her share my enormous wealth. How great my disappointment when Father explained to me with a smile that they were Austrian crowns from the time of the First World War, now worthless, no longer money to trade in, and of value only as make-believe notes for children to play with. But they're still good for games and pretending you're rich as can be.

Again I recall my other grandmother, Gittl, nee Birenbaum, my mother's mother. When I was child in kindergarten Grandmother Gittl brought me a fine sailor-suit from Warsaw, and I, prideful, stick out my chest bedecked with various medals, and declaim with boundless energy:

Na górze - róże	On the mountain,
roses	
Na dole - maliny	In the valley,
redberries	
Pójdziemy wszyscy	And we all
shall go	
Do Palestyny...	To the Land of
Israel.	

I also got a taste of the heder. This was the heder of R. Meir Melamed, where I learned only for one season, some chumash and Rashi. On winter nights we were carried home on the shoulders of the Belfers, equipped with torches and lights in front. The lure of that heder was not in the learning or practicing the alef-beis, nor in Reb Meir himself, but in Great-grandmother Malka. Every morning, on the way to heder, we passed by the doorway of the house of Great-grandfather Aharon and Great-grandmother Malka, who would distribute small coins to all her numerous little grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She lived to see them, the offspring of her sons and daughters and of her grown grandchildren.

My maternal grandfather, R. Yona Kirschenbaum, had four sons, Yisrael, Reuven, Moshe, and Elihayu, and two daughters, one of them Sheindl, my mother, the other Manya, the "daughter of old age". Early in the war Manya suffered a ailment in her legs, an

affliction that seriously disabled the beautiful girl. The three oldest sons already earned their own living, and were very well off, and I, the first grandson in the family, was terribly spoilt. Every uncle considered it his duty to buy me candies or to push a few coins into my hands, and I took them all.

I was fortunate in that mine was one of the large families in our town, Grenicz and Gniewoszczów. On both my father's and my mother's side the families were extensive, and dispersed in the two parts of the town. If I feel like, I can eat at Grandmother Hinda's house, and if not I can go to Gniewoszczów to Grandfather Yona's and eat there, and get fussed over, and play in the big yard, or in grandfather's stables, filled with hay. An old carriage stood in the yard, an object of wonder for the imagination of a small boy. If I got a bit bored, fed up with games and make-believe, I could visit any of my many uncles and aunts, on my father's side or my mother's, and go home only as evening fell. This caused great distress for my mother, who searched for me the whole day long. She would think that her only son had not eaten all day. She couldn't imagine that I sated myself everywhere I was; but when I got home I would put on an innocent and anguished face, to win my mother's tender pity. Food - and this is for your ears only - but on one condition: that I get a prize. The upshot was that by the time the war broke out I had accumulated a fortune: thirty zlotys.

A big family is a great boon: whenever you fight with your parents you can find refuge at one of your relations. You can escape there until the storm passes, and your parents' anger with you has died down. Naturally, you don't have to tell your grandmother and grandfather, or uncle and aunt, anything about the row you had with your parents, while they, at that very moment, are ransacking the whole town looking for you. When I reached my relations I told them that I had come because I missed them terribly, and it was so nice to be with

them. I would show up, and play and eat with the kids at their house. If they suspected anything, and began asking annoying questions, it was better to change the subject, or take my leave, and go to another uncle, at the other end of town. What bliss! Having a large family, and all living in the same town. Who can restore that vision to our times? When will this magic world be conjured up for our children?

The winter days are a wonderful world in white. You can slide on your rear end down every brow or hill, or go with your sled to the "mountain" next to grandfather R. Yona Kirschenbaum's in Gniewosów, and slide down there full pelt, and then climb up to the top again, and then down once more. Sledding was the pastime of the little ones; the bigger ones, more athletic, would go ice-skating, and our envy was immense. But not to catch cold on those chill winter days was impossible. And for a cold my mother had a tried and tested remedy, which if it did little good certainly did no harm; steaming tea, replete with all sorts of spices that filled our big cellar, it too a magic place. Large and roomy, crammed with countless jams and confections, especially towards winter. I remember that at the beginning of the war Father took care to stock it with coal and potatoes, and in the shortage more than one of the poor of the town went away with a sack full of coal free from Father's cellar. His heart was always open and concerned for the needs of the poor. The poor of the town knew that Pinhas Goldstein would not refuse to proffer them a helping hand. That's how it was before the war and that's how it was in the first years of the war, as long as we lived in our town.

Scant memories, but how precious, like only children, remnants snatched from the fire, the nestling in them is so deep. I remember Grenicz and Gniewosów, with their crowds of Jews, rich and poor. Two towns, they were as one in their Jewish character, so distinct that one only sensed the Gentile setting on going out to the suburbs, because the Jews lived the center. I remember you

all, without names, without faces; a spirited throng, vital and lively. I remember the great synagogue on Sabbaths and festivals, abuzz with the congregation of worshippers, filled with the lyric and soaring tones of the cantor, with his patriarchal white beard down to his sash, the cantor who was also the town's ritual slaughterer. I remember the street, teeming with men garbed in kapotes, and streimls on their heads, or just dressed in their festival best, after the service on those Sabbaths and festivals. I remember you all, you who were the community of that small vibrant town, the distant town of my birth.

I remember my large and widely branched family, the full, dignified, tall figure of my paternal great-grandfather, R. Aharon Liebhaver, and beside him his little wife, filled with wisdom and a good heart, Great-grandmother Malka. My grandmother on my father's side, Grandmother Hinda, who throughout her life carried the burden of supporting her household, while her husband served God at the synagogue, or leafed through the pages of the Gemara at home. I remember the daughters of Grandmother Hinda, Sheindl and Mirl, the sisters, and Mosheleh, my father's brother.

I remember my maternal grandfather, R. Yona Kirschenbaum, and my grandmother Gittl, I remember their young sons and their daughter, who in the best of their years, the prime of their lives, departed, never to return.

All of you, each and every one of you, I remember with great love, which the years have only intensified. With endless yearning I yearn for you, each of you singly, and all of you together. For all those I have mentioned and those I have not mentioned, because my memories, the memories of childhood, grow faint. May you live not only in me but in my children and my children's children.

The Second World War

When the war broke out I must have been six. My parents wanted to register me for school, but they

could not, as the school only accepted children aged seven. After the war broke out Jewish children were prohibited from going to the regular Polish school. There was no alternative for me but to learn at home, with a private tutor, for what Jewish father would neglect his son's education? My teacher was a young Jewish girl who came to us, one of those expelled from Lodz.

The war broke out, and our town was occupied by the German army. A German supplies officer was billeted in our house. He was an older man, a veteran of the First World War, and his manners were more decent. He was a kind of just man of Sodom. Once a cigar of his fell onto the floor near me and I scurried to grab the treasure, and decided to smoke the cigar. My goodness. Not just a small cigarette, smoked in secret, without my parents' knowing, but a long, thick cigar fell into my hands. I locked myself in the toilet in the yard and began to smoke it. My head started to swim, and the more I smoked, the more my head ached. My first attempt at smoking ended with nausea and vomiting, but that way I was cured and stopped smoking even before I began, and I'm not sorry.

In August 1942 we were expelled from the town, where already earlier a ghetto had been established. My parents and I and other relatives moved to the village/town of Chotcza, in what was then the Lipsk district. We lived there with the family of my maternal grandfather, R. Yona, in two rooms in a farmer's house. But rest was not granted us there either; two or three months later the Jews of the place and the refugees who had gone there were ordered out, to go to the ghetto in the town of Lipsk.

The Jews were loaded onto a convoy of wagons that set out under guard for Lipsk. Only a small group of men remained in the village, among them my father and a few other relatives and people originally from our town of Gniewoszczów. They were kept back to maintain order in Chotcza after the Jews had been sent away. My father's plan was that at night the men would try to get their families

out of the ghetto at Lipsk and go into hiding from the Germans.

Just before the expulsion my parents were faced with a serious problem concerning my little brother Ezra, then about two years old (he was born at the beginning of 1940). He was a lovely child, and looked like my mother, of blessed memory. But it would be impossible for them to keep him with them, as his crying or chatter could give them away to the Germans. Also, how could a two-year-old infant live in the harsh conditions of hiding? There was no alternative but to hand him over to the farmer's family with whom we lived. They were given a lot of money, and more was promised, on condition that they keep the child until the storm passed. So it was that he was left with the family of Polish farmers; my father stayed behind with the group of men in the town of Chotcza. I and my mother, with my grandfather's family and my other relatives, set off in the wagon convoy to the ghetto at Lipsk.

My mother, Sheindl, daughter of R. Yona Kirschenbaum and Gittl, nee Birnbaum - I shall remember her all my days as a valiant woman, full of vigor, energetic and devoted to her family. That is how she had been before the war, and these qualities came to the fore all the more during and after the war, until Polish killers murdered her after she had endured all the circles of the hell of the war. All the way to Lipsk, huddled in the carts and surrounded by a German guard detail, Mother thought of only one thing: escape! She knew that escape from the ghetto would be infinitely more difficult. And sure enough, as we approached Lipsk, whose houses could be seen in the distance, and as evening fell, she took me, an eight-year-old child, and we fled from the convoy and managed to hide in a field. We waited in the field until nighttime, and when we heard the rattle of the wheels of the empty carts returning from the town we went back to the road, stopped a wagon, and in it we returned to Chotcza. When he saw us Father was greatly surprised, because he had not expected to see us again so soon. That same night we handed

my brother over to the Gentiles, tears streaming endlessly from the eyes of my father and my mother. We put the infant to bed, and as he slept the sleep of angels we kissed him farewell, and at once, in the night, we slipped away, moving through rough country, back to the vicinity of our town of Gniewosów. Thus began the time of hiding.

For several months we hid in villages round about, in the houses of various farmers. Every few nights, sometimes every night, we moved from one farmhouse to another, where they took us in and fed us, for much money and not out of pity or human feelings. The situation was becoming grave, with the approach of winter of 1942/3. The searches by the Germans and the Poles for Jews in hiding grew more intense, as did the wariness of the Poles and their unwillingness to risk concealing Jews, even for money. Moreover, many of them were openly gleeful about the fate of the Jews. The Polish people was consumed by hatred and antisemitism, and many were all in favor of the extermination of the Jews by the Germans and even thanked them for it, even though their own land had become mire under the Nazi jackboot.

At one farmer's where we hid, his son-in-law and family from Warsaw were staying. They had come to the village because they were destitute and could not support themselves in Warsaw. But the son-in-law was not used to village life, and missed Warsaw. An agreement was struck whereby the whole family would go back to Warsaw, taking my mother and me with them, while my father would remain in hiding with the farmers. The idea was that for one man on his own it would be easier. In return for the shelter the Polish family gave me and my mother, they would receive enough money for their sustenance. Thus my mother and I arrived at Kapuczyńska Street in Warsaw, while my father stayed on alone at the village.

In Warsaw

We lived in Warsaw, but we could not see the city. Fear of going out into the street was too great,

lest we be recognized as Jews. Many Poles had made Jew-hunting their livelihood. Whenever they caught a Jew they would extort money from him under the threat of turning him in to the Germans, and they never stopped. We were also terrified of the "actions" conducted by the Germans on the Polish side. So we were closed up in the apartment every day and every evening. The aim was not to be seen by neighbors and visitors. Only late at could we step into the yard to breathe some fresh air.

We remained in Warsaw several months, and because peril lay in wait for anyone who hid Jews, my mother decided to return to my father's hiding place in the village. Perhaps Mother wished to be with Father, and share with him his fate in his wanderings among the Polish villages. I do not know what the decisive factor was. In any event, one day my mother took her leave of me, and dressed as a Polish woman she returned to my father. I remained alone in Warsaw with the Polish family.

Alone

As I have said, I hid in one of the houses on Kapuczinska Street in Warsaw. I was not acquainted with the street because I was not allowed out. Indeed, I did not get to know Warsaw at all despite my being there over two years, because I never left my hiding place, even at night.

To enhance my sense of safety I was provided with Polish papers in the name of Jan Wiecezorek. On my arrival in Warsaw I knew only Yiddish, but I was forbidden to speak that language even in the presence of my mother, and I was forced to talk only in Polish. I gradually became fluent in this language, and Yiddish was pushed aside. To become completely free in Polish, and to gain an acquaintance with Polish literature, I was registered at the library by the oldest daughter of the householder. Slowly I gained mastery of the language. At the end of my period of hiding I read so well that I could complete the reading of a book in a single day.

After my mother left, a hideout was prepared

for me in a loft, so small that I could not stretch my legs and I was forced to lie with my legs bunched up. I spent about two years in this loft, until the summer of 1944, when the Polish uprising erupted. A constant murk lay over my "abode", penetrated by only rare rays of light. During the day, by straining my eyes I was somehow able to read, but in the evenings total darkness reigned in the loft and I could not read. So I sank into thought.

For almost two years I hardly ever came down from the loft, and I performed my bodily functions there too. I saw no one, apart from the inhabitants of the apartment. The only sounds I heard were those that rose from the rooms below. The rumble of the Warsaw streets reached my ears as if from a distant and bewitched world. I was like a bit of rubbish tossed up into the loft where I dwelt among the rest of the junk, except that this bit of rubbish needed to eat. And yes, I had neighbors in my loft, uninvited guests. Fleas were my faithful companions throughout those years.

My sole consolation in those dark days was the books. Were it not for ceaseless reading I would have become mentally ill. I read books non-stop, each day a new book. If memory serves, I must have read about 700 books. I would write down the name of the book, its author, and its subject. I gorged on every kind of book: children's books, tales of adventure, science, history. Everything was worth reading. Slowly a picture of the world began to form in my mind. I learned many chapters of history, I got to know the concepts and fundamentals and ideals of life. Thanks to the books a world perception gradually took shape within me, and the beginnings of an outlook on life.

Through my thinking and my reading a firm decision was forged in my heart, as I lay contorted in my darkened cave: to defend myself when the Germans came to take me. So I asked them to buy me a sheath knife. A sheath knife I didn't get, but they bought me a large penknife. This became my

comrade, and I never was separated from it. I was a child in thinking that it was possible to defend myself against the Germans with a penknife. It also became clear to me, perhaps thanks to the education I received in my father's home, perhaps thanks to reading books, that I had a land, my homeland, somewhere in the east, and Poland was not my homeland. After the war I would leave Poland, I would go to my land, the homeland of the Jews. All those years I lived in the hope that I would live, would survive the war. This was an irrational belief, based on nothing.

Lying still all the time, immobile, my limbs tightly constricted, caused a weakening of my leg muscles, to the point that I could not straighten them, or walk. A long time would be needed before my legs could regain their strength.

Days, weeks, and months passed, and nothing happened. I lived the same monotonous, unchanging life. Very rarely I received news of my parents, and even more rarely some event occurred in my life in my tiny loft. Sometimes I heard a noise from the rooms below, after which silence fell again. But one day I heard raised voices. From fragments of what the people were saying, and the husband and wife, I gathered that a revolt had broken out in the ghetto. The Christians were gripped by enormous excitement. My "benefactor" was a young urban Pole, extremely nationalistic, not without antisemitic sentiments; he hid me only out of greed. His tone concerning the uprising held a note of admiration. The Jews were openly fighting the Germans! The Jews were holding on, and even killing Germans! What a miracle! For Jews to do such a thing was unbelievable! In the end they could not restrain themselves. They came up to me and told me about the events that had erupted in the Warsaw ghetto. I don't know what their intention was: perhaps they wanted to voice esteem for the Jews and perhaps to hearten me, or maybe it was just to relate to me a historic occurrence in the life of Warsaw. In that manner I learned of the Warsaw ghetto uprising and the war of Anilewicz and his

comrades. But after a while it all died down, and when they next came up it was to tell me angrily that because of the Jews the Germans were destroying their Warsaw.

More days, weeks, and months passed. From catches of conversation I heard from the apartment below I learned that the Russian front was drawing nearer. Then came the day when I heard the boom of artillery, and suddenly uproar down below, enormous commotion. The insurrection of the Poles had broken out, under the leadership of Bor Komarowski. I did not know much about the course of the revolt, I felt only one thing: with every air raid the householders went down into the shelter and I alone was left to my fate and the chance of a German bomb.

Daily, like clockwork, the German aircraft raided us, until one day a bomb struck and destroyed the right-hand wing of the house in which I was hidden. And then I began to re-read the last book I had got with the outbreak of the uprising; I had no other choice, for what could I do? Fear of the street prevailed over me, and furthermore my legs were paralyzed. So I remained where I was, awaiting what was to come.

I grew accustomed to the mortar bombing, and was not perturbed when a shell struck the apartment above me. In its trajectory the mortar made a noise like a cow mooing, or the scrape of a rusty cupboard door. This sound heralded the coming bombardment, and it strained the nerves. Tense and charged, we waited for the shells that in a brief moment would strike our house. I felt a similar tense expectation when the German dive-bombers attacked us. I heard the scream of the diving plane and waited helplessly for the bomb to fall on the house.

The Germans destroyed systematically, street by street and house by house. The turn of our street came. All the residents were herded outside, and the healthy men were sent to Germany to work, while the women and children were evacuated from Warsaw.

When our turn came the whole family went

outside, and left me under lock and key within. I awaited my fate, penknife in hand.. I thought, maybe I'll manage to hold out in my hideaway until the Russians take the city. But how to hold out I did not know.

The Germans planned to turn Warsaw into a pile of rubble. House after house was set ablaze and only the charred skeleton remained. Then came the turn of the house in which I was hiding.

One day I smelled the apartment filling up with smoke. First I thought it would immediately dissipate, and I would last out, but I felt myself slowly suffocating. I had no choice but to crawl out of my loft through the shattered window. I was almost blinded, because this was the first time in two years that I saw sunlight, and it was summertime. I can imagine that anyone who saw me then must have thought that I was a creature from another world. What looked like the body of a child, crawling on all fours, as if raised in the wild, hair hanging down over his chest, for it was a year since it had been cut, and clothes in tatters.

As I crawled I saw the bodies of two people sprawled in the destruction of the deserted courtyard, and about three paces from me stood two armed German soldiers, staring at me. By their uniforms, which were different from those of the gendarmes or the SS, I knew that they were front-line soldiers, and after they recovered from the shock of the apparition that I was they hauled me up by the arms and dragged me along with them.

We reached Theater Square. There two gendarmes stopped us, and an argument developed between them and the two soldiers who gripped me. Apparently they were quarrelling about my origins. They pulled my trousers down to ascertain if I was a Jew or not. The gendarmes cocked their rifles, and were going to shoot me; but the soldiers stopped them. They took me with them to their assembly area, fed me, and gave me different clothes. In an odd concoction of black outsize clothes, I was led to some water and I washed. Towards evening they took

me in a wagon to an assembly point of the Polish population that had been ordered out of Warsaw. I remember that this was a big church and all of us were concentrated in its large nave. At the entrance the prisoners were classified: the healthy and the young were sent to forced labor in Germany; the sick to the hospitals, and the rest were expelled from Warsaw, every man for himself. I was taken to hospital because I couldn't stand. This was the large Twerki hospital, near Warsaw, whose inmates the Germans had exterminated because they were mental patients.

In Hospital

I spent the period August 1944 to January 1945, when the Russians opened their winter offensive and occupied Poland, in that hospital.

The patients were left to their own devices. They were provided with hardly any food, except for fifty grams of bread for breakfast and boiled water. At midday I was given cabbage leaves in boiled water, and for supper again fifty grams of bread and boiled water. But anyone with money could get some food to keep body and soul together. Men would exchange any shred of tobacco they had for a portion of bread, and vice versa. There were no doctors; only nuns tended us.

At first I had 500 zlotys, or a goral, as that note was called, a present from the two German soldiers who had picked me up in Warsaw before taking leave of me. This money helped me a little in the beginning, because I could buy some food with it at the hospital gate. Soon the money ran out, and I grew thinner by the day until I became a transparent skeleton.

In the ward where I lay I was the only boy, so I drew the attention of the patients. Some guessed that I was Jewish, which I of course strenuously denied. I recall a priest who used to visit us, and in whose Christian prayers I joined consistently and piously. One day he took me aside, and asked diplomatically, was I not of the Mosaic faith? Naturally I denied it. The situation reached

deadlock. They surmised that I was a Jew and I disclaimed it.

In the hospital I was among people again, and I absorbed impressions and conversations. This was the first time in two years that I was among living people. Furthermore, I began to walk, indeed slowly and limping, but gradually I could straighten up and flex my muscles, and begin to restore them to their function. I started to walk upright.

Thus the days passed in the hospital. People died and others stayed alive. Those who did fretfully awaited the Russian offensive and liberation. I hoped that my parents were still alive; if so they would undoubtedly have kept in touch with the farmer with whose daughter and son-in-law I had hidden in Warsaw. My plan was to write to him immediately after liberation and tell him where I was, in the hope that my parents would find me.

Then the great day came. From early in the morning we heard a kind of incessant thunder carried in from the east. At first we did not grasp the significance of this, until we realized that it was the Russian attack. The firing and the thunder of the guns grew closer to the city, and a few days later we were liberated.

Impatiently, I waited for the renewal of the Polish mailing services, and indeed, as soon as they were in operation I sent a letter to the farmer, Gavron, to whom I had been taken two years before. From that moment I was strained, tense with hope that my parents were alive. The uncertainty swung me between despair and expectation, for what would I do, alone and desolate in this cruel world?

The hospital began to empty; they all started to make their way back to their own place and family. More and more beds were vacated, and only a few people remained within the hospital walls, I among them. They asked me what I was waiting for, and I evaded the question by silence or I gave some pointless answer. As long as they let me stay there I waited, and did not leave.

Then one day my mother was by my side. We were

rejoined after so long a separation, and now we were free. Free from the terror of the Germans. Our meeting cannot be described. No written word is capable of expressing the sanctity of these encounters, of Jewish mothers who survived and found their children. The pen is too paltry and human discourse too slight to convey such an experience to another. Better it remain imprinted on the soul as a holy and pure lode.

On our way back to the town of our birth we traversed Warsaw in its ruins. On that journey my mother told me what had happened to her and my father during that entire long period. She told of Grandmother Hinda and her youngest daughter Mirele, my aunt. They too had tried to hide in the vicinity of our town and both were murdered by Poles, greedy for the little bit of money the two hunted women had, or just out of antisemitism and thirst for any Jewish blood. So my grandmother Hinda and the daughter of her old age, in the springtime of her life, not yet twenty-one years old, met their deaths at murderous Polish hands, and their grave is somewhere in one of the forests of Poland, outside our town.

We reached the town. At the railway station we were met by my uncle Eliyahu, my mother's youngest brother, who also had survived. I was reunited with my father, and with the handful of Jews who had congregated in the town, some from the villages round about, some from the concentration camps.

The town was barely recognizable. Many houses had been destroyed, but ours remained intact because it served as a Polish police station. It seemed as if we were ready to return to normal living. But that was an illusion.

The single people who remained of all the dwellers of that flourishing Jewish town looked it over for a brief moment, but they could not find it within them to remain, and they moved on, out into the wide world. The few surviving families also realized that there was no longer any life there. My father planned to move to Lodz, and it was also envisaged that I would enter a Polish high school.

At the same time my parents began their search for my younger brother Ezra, who had been left in Chotcza in 1942.

However, because of the struggle between gangs of the right-wing Armia Krajowa and the communist Polish government my parents were unable to go to Chotcza to search for my brother. The surroundings were most perilous because of the Armia Krajowa gangs that lurked there. But we heard from the priest of Chotcza that my brother was alive. The priest related that the Gentile family, having received the money, kept the boy for a while, but later they became afraid of the risk and decided to leave him in the street, and that is what they did. The child was thrown out into the street, where he was found by Polish policemen who took him to the police station. They asked the gendarmerie at Lipsk what to do with him. The answer was "Whatever you like", meaning kill him. Among the policemen there was one without any children of his own, and he took the boy as if he was going to kill him, but he hid him and indeed adopted him. This policeman, the priest said, left Chotcza after liberation and moved to the territory of western Poland, intending to disappear, because police who had acted in the service of the Germans had a bad reputation after liberation. My parents began to search for this policeman, and actually got onto his trail, when the calamity fell. To this very day I am in quest of my brother, of whom all trace has disappeared. I have still not given up hope that sooner or later I shall find him.

After remaining in the town for a few months we decided to move to Lodz. My uncle Eliyau took me by train to that city, and left me in our apartment. He himself returned to the town to fetch my parents a few days later, and then to settle in Lodz while we planned our next steps.

I was left on my own in the apartment, awaiting my parents. A few days passed and my parents did not arrive. I began to worry, until the news was brought to me.

A pogrom had been unleashed in the town. The

Poles murdered my parents, my uncle Eliyahu, my aunt, the wife of R. Avraham Liebhaber, and another Jewess. Five Jews, survivors of the Holocaust, were murdered by the Poles. All were murdered in cold blood by murderers devoid of human likeness.

May their memory be blessed, and their rest, in a foreign land, far from their dear ones, be true repose. But let their spilt blood remind us, and the world, that the Poles were accomplices of the Nazi beast in the murder of Jews; their unclean accomplices, cold-blooded murderers. Never forget!